

The 2nd ZeBBies Report

*An examination of writing for film, radio,
theatre and television in Ireland in the twelve
month period from mid 2007 to mid 2008.*

July 2009



Irish
Playwrights &
Screenwriters
Guild

**The 2nd
ZeBBies Report**

Introduction

The Second ZeBBies report is something of a relief to the Board of the IPSG in that it confirms both the figures that we produced in the first year and the trends which we expected to see in the volume and nature of work available to writers for the stage and screen in Ireland. The most dramatic new piece of evidence is the number of writers who had at least some earning from writing in the first year and who then had no income in the second. This was not unexpected but seems larger when seen in practise then we might have anticipated, and of course brings the average annual income of writers downwards.

The Guilds intention is to continue to publish the ZeBBies report on an annual basis. We can expect that the third report will start to identify trends over time as well as basic information and will provide in consequence a valuable tool to inform further policy making.

Recession Warning!!

This report looks at production up to end June 2008. Since that date there has been a very rapid decline in the amount of new paid writing being commissioned. The picture presented here is pre-recession. The current reality is very much worse than that depicted here. We have decided to go ahead with the publication of this report in order to have a clear basis against which to measure the present situation when we produce our next report.

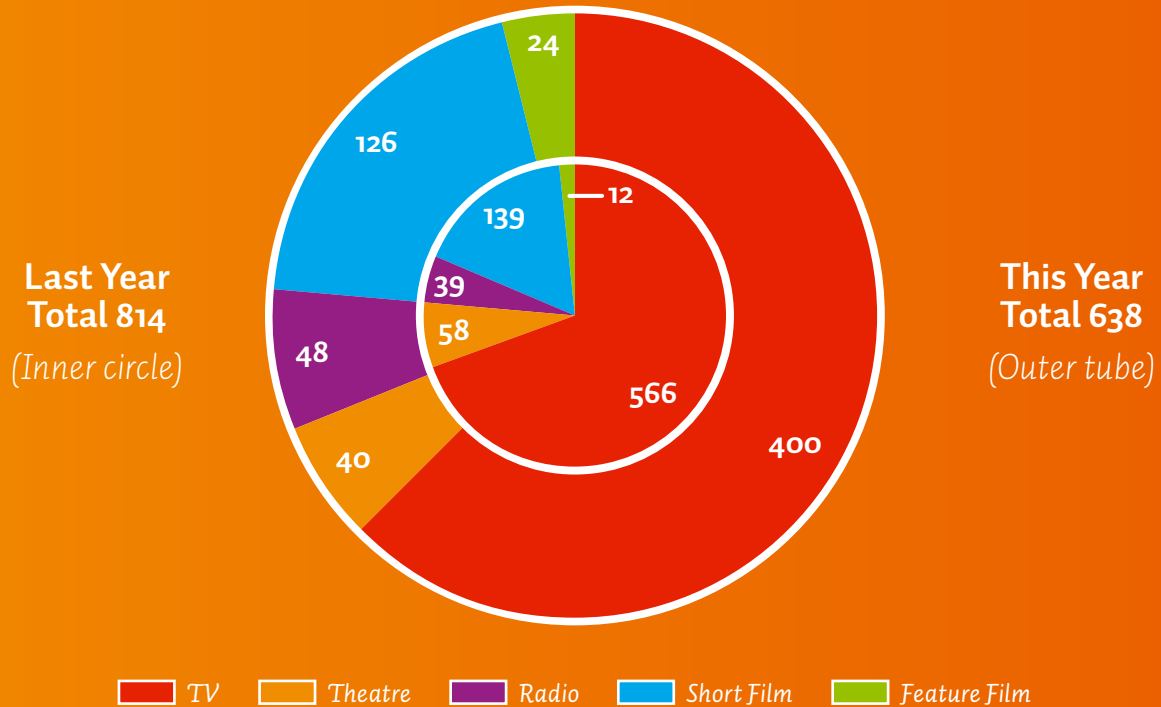
According to recent statistics from the Irish Film Board the audio visual industry employs some 7000 people. While much of the production that employs these people is not scripted it none the less seems profoundly inefficient to us that the group of people who provide the scripts that are at the origin and the core of much audiovisual production should be so inadequately recompensed.

AUDREY O'REILLY

Chairwoman

Irish Playwrights' and Screenwriters' Guild

TOTAL VOLUME OF PRODUCTION FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS



How much paid writing is being done in Ireland?

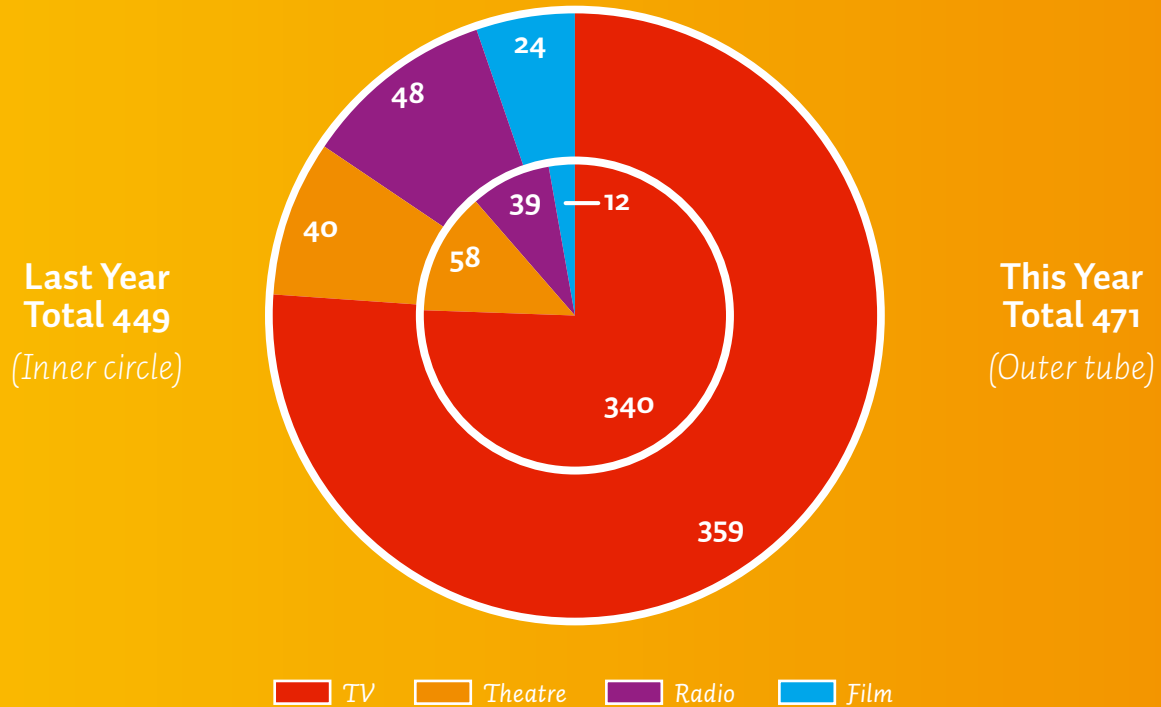
The Irish Playwrights' and Screenwriters' Guild represents writers for radio, film, television and theatre.

This 2nd ZeBBies report covers the twelve month period from 1st July 2007 to 30th June 2008. In that period we have listed 638 productions with credited writers who are Irish (or normally resident in Ireland) in television, theatre, radio and film.

There may be inadequacies or inaccuracies in that list and we are happy to be told of any productions which should be included or excluded from the overall list. The full list is available on our website at www.script.ie/zebbies-nominations.php.

The accompanying chart compares the volume of production in each area to the equivalent figure for the previous year.

VOLUME OF PRODUCED PROJECTS OF +25” IN EACH OF THE LAST TWO YEARS



Excluding shorts

The overall production figures include a large number of short films and some shorts produced for television. Including these shorts in the overall figures may produce distorting effects in that many writers are not paid for writing short films and relatively large numbers of short programmes can be written in any one year for television series which are not repeated the following year.

As a result, and as we did in the first year of the ZeBBies report, we have reduced the list to those productions which are a television half hour or longer. So excluding shorts and television programmes less than a television half hour in length and including in only those productions of a television half hour or more the total of those productions for the year is 471 (compared to 449 in the previous year).

It can be seen that the number of shorts is considerably reduced from the first year to the second. The number of one-off shorts has actually increased so the decrease is primarily in series (such as animation series for children).

The accompanying chart compares the numbers in each category to the numbers of the previous year and are worth more examination.

The more than doubling of the number of feature films is welcome but is unlikely to be sustained for the future. A point of note is that a number of these films are very, very low budget films which have been produced in large measure because of the determination of the film makers.

In television a key reason for the maintenance of numbers at the level of last year is the increase in Irish language television drama (e.g. the series “The Running Mate” (four episodes) and “Seacht”(eight episodes)). This very welcome development is partly a result of increased funds being available through the BCI Sight and Sound Fund and the Irish Language Broadcast Fund.

The increase in the number of radio plays may not reflect an actual increase but rather better counting on our part. We think that the increase is largely the result of a more thorough search of the production of BBC Northern Ireland.

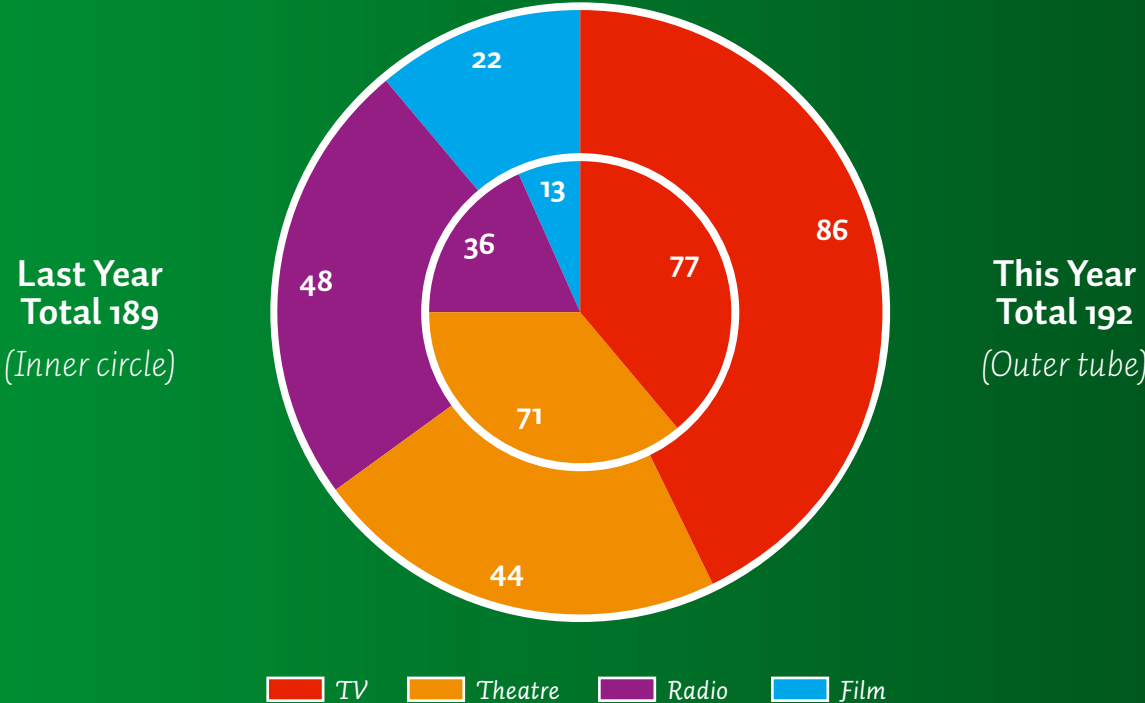
The substantial drop in the number of theatre premieres (from 58 to 40) is of serious concern and a cause cannot easily be identified. This may be a result of poorer counting in the second year but we don't think so.

Adding in projects in development

Writers are often also paid to write projects which are not guaranteed to go into production. These projects are usually described as 'in development' in film and we have used that terminology here to cover all scripts, being paid for while being written, in film, television, theatre and radio.

Making this count cannot be as precise as the count of produced projects for a number of reasons. We have established the list by reference to a) all projects put into active development in the year in question funded by the Film Board b) theatre projects funded in the year by the Arts Council c) a calculation of work in development with the IPU in RTE based on their annual reports d) information from the Media Desks e) information from various theatre companies and f) guesstimates of work in development directly funded by producers, theatre companies etc. Our best calculation is that the total number of projects for which writers were paid in the year is 762 (930 last year).

NUMBER OF WRITERS WITH PRODUCED PROJECTS OF +25” FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS



How many writers had their work produced and/or put into paid development?

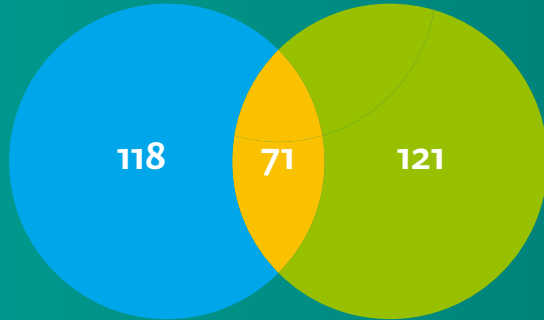
Looking at the 471 projects of more than a television half hour produced in this second year of the ZeBBies report these were written by 192 writers (compared to 189 writers in the previous year).

The number of writers of produced work in each sector, compared with the equivalent number in the previous year is indicated in the accompanying graph. (Where projects have more than one writer we have of course counted all.)

Adding in those writers who had work in development in the year under review the total number becomes (excluding shorts) 294 (last year 279).

Given our uncertainty about the quality of our counting of projects in development, and given that we will start to find projects which were put into development in first two years of the ZeBBies reports going into production over the next year, we intend to concentrate for the next (third) ZeBBie report on improving our counting of projects in development.

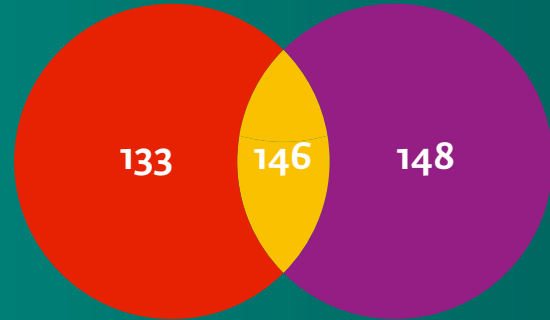
**WRITERS WITH PRODUCED
PROJECTS OF +25” FOR EACH
OF THE LAST TWO YEARS**



Year One
189

Year Two
192

**WRITERS WITH PRODUCED OR
DEVELOPED PROJECTS OF +25”
FOR EACH OF THE LAST TWO YEARS**



Year One
279

Year Two
294

Were the writers who got work in the 1st year reviewed the same people as those who got work in the 2nd year?

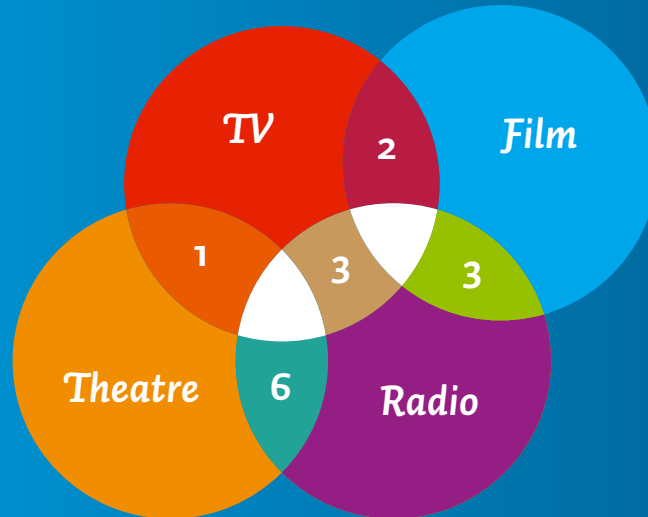
Of course a key point in is whether the people who were paid in the first year continued to earn from their writing in the second year.

Looking only at the writers who had produced work in either of the two years examined (i.e. excluding for the moment writers with projects in development) only 71 writers (of the 189 total in the first year and the 192 total in the second year) had produced projects in both years. This, of course, has a dramatic impact on average earnings over the two years.

It's possible of course that those writers who had produced project in the first year had projects in paid development in the second.

Including in projects in development is not as precise as the produced project because we have made estimates of projects in development in some areas so we do not always know the identity of the writers with work in development. The following figures therefore are not entirely accurate. But, given this caveat, it seems 146 writers had paid work in either production or development in both of the two years reviewed (of 279 in the first year and 294 in the second).

WRITERS WITH PRODUCED PROJECTS OF +25" IN MORE THAN ONE AREA



Writing in more than one category

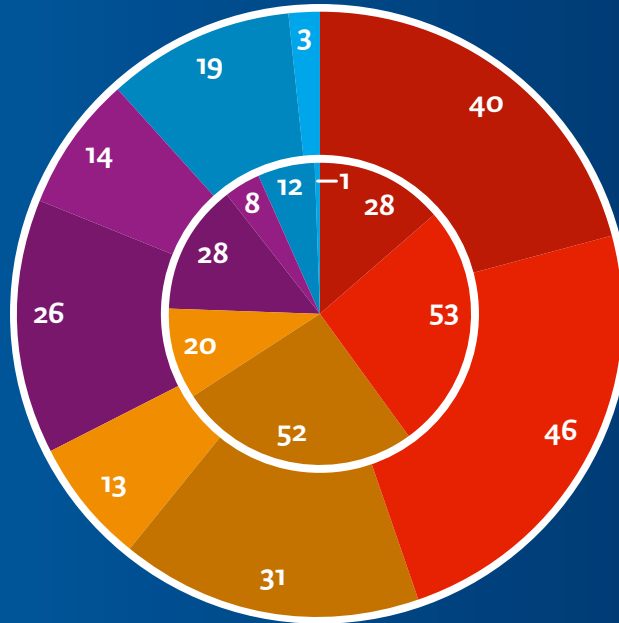
The question as to whether writers undertake work in more than one area of writing for performance continues to be largely unanswerable as the number of produced projects written by each writer is too small to produce an answer – most writers in the two years having written only one produced project.

However the accompanying chart amalgamates this information for two years and shows a low level of writing across different areas. The main area with an identifiable overlap is radio and theatre, which reflects the tendency of RTE Radio to commission established writers for theatre to write for radio.

GENDER BREAKDOWN OF WRITERS WHO PRODUCED PROJECTS OF +25''

Last Year
Total Male 120
Total Female 82
(Inner circle)

This Year
Total Male 116
Total Female 76
(Outer tube)



Male Female TV

Male Female Theatre

Male Female Radio

Male Female Feature Film

Gender issues

We noticed the idiosyncrasies in the gender breakdown of writers for performance last year in our first report and we have tried to dig deeper into the figures for this years report.

There are essentially two issues which can be identified in respect of the level of representation of women. The first is a general situation of a lower percentage of women at every level in writing for performance from entry level onwards than the level in the general population.

The accompanying chart shows the breakdown of women writers of produced projects over a television half hour in each to the two years reviewed.

The total figures here are similar to, or better than, equivalent figures in the United Kingdom and the US.

But in the breakdown between sectors it becomes clear that the overall figures are primarily dependent on television and in particular the two long running series.

However in feature film there appears to be an active bias against women writers.

All of the evidence that we can assemble implies that about one third of those who write for performance are

women. For example at the time of preparation of this report there were 476 member of the Guild. Of these 309 (65%) are men and 167 (35%) women. Nor does there seem to be any evidence that women are less interested to write for feature film than men.

As an example the Masters degree in screenwriting (which concentrates exclusively on writing for feature film) in Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology has had 93 students over the past eight years of which 42 (45%) have been women.

However women are significantly less likely to be funded for the development of a script for a feature film than men are.

Looking, for example, at the number of projects funded for development by the Irish Film Board in the year under review 53 of the 68 projects funded were written by men (15 or 22%, compared to 20% for the previous year, by women).

This continues to produced projects where, although 20% of projects put into development are written by women, only 10% of feature film projects which go into production are written by women.

How much did writers earn from this work in the year under review?

To calculate the average income of writers in this year we have gone through the list of productions and totalled the fees paid. In many cases the Guild is aware of the exact amount paid to writers for the work in question. In many cases we can make an accurate guess based on our experience and in some cases we have contacted writers to ask them directly. In some of the remaining areas we have had to make educated guesses. But we are confident that the figures are largely accurate.

The average income of the 192 writers who earned an income for produced work in the year under review is €14,795, compared to €15,400 for last year. Given the occasional guesses that we have to make in assembling the figures this gap between this year and last year is probably not relevant but it may be that it reflects the lower rate which generally pertains for writing in Irish and the very low amounts paid to writers of the very low budget feature films that have helped to increase the number of feature films produced this year compared to last.

What is the average annual income for writers calculated over the two years reviewed by the ZeBBies reports?

An important caveat has to be entered here. While the number of writers who earned income from writing in each year is approximately the same and the average income is approximately the same the individuals who are paid each year varies considerably, as pointed out above.

The average annual income over two years for writers with produced work is €9275. Including in development work increases the number of writers getting work but leaves the average income over two years only slightly increased to €9,365.

To summarise:

A little under 300 writers each year in the two years reviewed earned an average of just under €15,000. However only somewhat less than 150 of those who earned money from writing in the first year also earned money in the second year. Looking at the two years together between 400 and 450 writers (30% of them women) earned some money from writing in either of the two years. Their average annual income was a little under €10,000.

The ZeBBies are an annual award for writing for performance, established by the Irish Playwrights' and Screenwriters' Guild and named in honour of O. Z. Whitehead.

Members of the Guild read and vote for scripts nominated in the areas of film, television, theatre and radio.

The 2007/2008 awards were announced on November 25th 2008 (extracts from the ceremony can be seen <http://www.script.ie/zebbies-2008.php>) and awards were made to:

| | |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Best Television Script | Mark O'Halloran for <i>Prosperity</i> (Episode 3 "Georgie's Story") |
| Best Radio Script | Lucy Caldwell for <i>Girl from Mars</i> |
| Best Theatre Script | Christian O'Reilly for <i>Is this about Sex?</i> |
| Best Film Script | Martin McDonagh for <i>In Bruges</i> |
| Honorary Services to Writers Award | Writers' Guilds of America |

The Guild is grateful to the Irish Copyright Licensing Agency and Domino's Pizzas for their support of the event.



Senator David Norris



Hilda Fay and Christian O'Reilly



David Begg and Bob Schneider



Tom Hickey and Mark O'Halloran



Kevin McHugh and Lucy Caldwell



Christian O'Reilly, Lucy Caldwell and Mark O'Halloran



This document is copyright of the Irish Playwrights' and Screenwriters' Guild. Any errors or omissions are our responsibility. The information in this document may be quoted provided the source is acknowledged.

We are grateful to the many people who provided information for the ZeBBies and for this analysis. We would very much appreciate having any comments, views or opinions on the material presented here.

Thanks to Clíona Ruiséil; Lindsay Jane Sedgwick and Kate Perry for assistance with some of the more mind-numbing analysis.



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